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ABSTRACT

Although commitment to equal opportunities in employment has been a major component of European Community legislation and although increasing numbers of European women are entering professions, women throughout Europe still face many barriers to advancing in their professions. Since the early 1970s, European governments including Finland have worked to increase the numbers of females enrolling in vocational and professional institutions. Although Finnish women under age 50 are now better educated than men, gender still remains a strong factor influencing people's career choices/behaviors, and men still hold more technical, professional, and managerial positions. In Finland and the other Nordic countries, the transformation of professional education and scientific knowledge has begun through women's studies. Finnish society and Finland's social services already offer support systems for women seeking to combine family and work responsibilities. By using the following strategies, educators and counselors throughout Europe can promote gender equity and women's career aspirations: enhance individual autonomy; help women develop strategic career plans, gain autonomy and decision-making authority, build an identity, network, and obtain mentor support in building a career; recruit nontraditional students; and eliminate harassment. (The bibliography contains 13 references. Appended is a list of 35 related European Community publications.) (MN)

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A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S CAREER ASPIRATIONS

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Introduction

Vocational and professional education, with their close connection with the workforce and the division of labour, plays an important role in the transmission of gender-role concepts and career aspiration models. Teachers, parents and administrators' awareness of stereotyping behaviour in society and in education is a starting point for rectifying gender biases in teaching and work.

European countries show a clear gender stratification in working life although they differ in the vertical and horizontal division of labour between females and males. The gender system of societies reflects the traditional and stereotyped job roles and parenting patterns. Consequently, men's work concentrates on material production and women's work on caring and nurturing; men are leaders and managers while women are subordinates and assistants. Women are guided and controlled more closely than men. Women work, paid or unpaid, including housework, at least twice as many hours as men do. Education and leadership patterns reproduce the societal gender system. International studies of vocational teachers' gender role attitudes have revealed that male teachers followed the patterns associated with gender-segregated division of labour, whereas female teachers' perceptions of gender roles were more compatible with progressive equity legislation policies. Female vocational teachers' focus on gender-role attitudes seemed to differ from males' in that they supported equality of material and intellectual opportunities. Male vocational teachers tended to support women's housekeeping roles rather than roles related to career development.

Historically, the gender-biased division of labour has shaped stereotypes both of female competencies and of women's self-images. The personal characteristics and modes of action commonly attributed to women by biased opinions -- unintelligence, emotionality, and inability to handle issues outside everyday routine -- are, in actual fact, characteristics of the

tasks and occupations that women have been assigned in the division of labour. Although women do suffer economically because of sexism, traditional gender-role expectations also prevent men from using the full range of their emotional and intellectual capabilities. Men's traditional gender roles seem to be stifling to the extent of impairing of men's health and making fathers unable to become involved with their children.

Commitment to equal opportunities in employment has also been a major component of European Community legislation. The Treaty of Rome (Article 119), one of the foundations of the European Community established in 1957, included the principles of equal pay for equal work and equality of opportunity in training. The further Directives on Equal Pay in 1975, on Equality of Treatment between Men and Women Workers in 1976, and on Equal Treatment for Men and Women in matters of national social security in 1978 are legally binding in the member states (see EU-references in Appendix 1). Sections of the European Parliament and the European Commission have gone on to focus on equal opportunities in education and employment. For instance, the Women's Information Bureau of the Commission, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities, and a permanent committee on women's right in the European Parliament have been established.

The combination of research efforts and the social movement for gender equity has made some difference in the past twenty years' educational practice and leadership. These changes include increased expenditures for women's studies and for research on women, a greater number of female students enroled on traditionally male-dominated courses leading to corresponding professions, some increase in the number of women managers, and the inclusion of gender concerns in curriculum materials.

Yet, in spite of the increased numbers of women entering the professions, equality between professional men and women has not been accomplished. The career track of aspiring professional women diverges significantly from that of men after some years of graduation. The divergence is most notable at the higher ranks. Only a small percentage of the highest positions in any profession are held by women. Further, the women who are entering the professions are not paid as well as men and are not gaining full professional authority.

This paper describes the barriers women face in making their way up the professional promotion. Strategies and cases of women's career promotion from Finland are discussed. Implications for identifying the European dimension of promoting women's professional career aspirations are suggested.

Women in Higher Education

In Europe since the 1960s there has been a general growth in female enrolment at all levels of education. Along with this phenomenon, women's participation in the labour market has increased. As a result, women's lifestyle and their awareness of equal opportunities concerning qualifications and employment have changed as compared to the representatives of previous generations. In spite of the considerable progress made, persistent segregation remains in educational enrolment and in the division of labour.

Since the early 1970s, European governments have introduced measures which have resulted in the rapid improvement of girls' educational opportunities. For instance, where access to upper secondary education has been on a selective basis, girls equalled or outnumbered boys among twelve member states of EC in 1983-1990. Further, exam results at the upper secondary level revealed that in academic studies the mean performance of girls is superior to that of boys in academic studies in Finland, Sweden, Spain, Greece, West Germany, France and Belgium. About 60 per cent of Finnish general upper secondary school graduates from the academic track are females.

However, despite progress, considerable disparities remain in enrolment in vocational education and training, and in patterns of subject choice in upper secondary and higher education. Some areas of vocational education, such as engineering and technology, in further and higher education remain male-dominated in the Western European countries. In Finland, less than 5 per cent of all students enroling at vocational and professional institutions were in the mixed fields where the proportion of men and women varies between 41 and 60 per cent in 1992. The target of Finnish vocational education has been that at least 30 per cent of the minority gender would be represented in all occupational fields. Almost 40 per cent of the year's new university students were in mixed fields in Finland. The progress achieved in the countries of West has taken place in other than technical areas, such as law, administration and medicine.

European women students, apart from those from Poland (see Table 11.3), are still underrepresented in the natural sciences, mathematics and computer sciences, engineering and technology. Male students are correspondingly underrepresented in education, the humanities and the fine arts. A more even gender balance is seen in the social and behavioral sciences, law, administrative and business studies. Such subject areas as architecture and town planning

vary in their patterns of enrolment from one country to another.

In European higher education, male postgraduate students still greatly outnumber female postgraduates, which in turn gives rise to a considerable underrepresentation of women in the academic workforce of universities and other institutions of higher education. In the Nordic countries, at more advanced levels of studies women are in the minority: women's proportion in those gaining a doctorate was 19 per cent in Denmark and Norway, 24 per cent in Sweden, and 34 per cent in Finland in 1988. Finnish women hold a little more than half of all Master's degrees. The number of Finnish women in the professions of lawyers, solicitors, attorneys, doctors and economists has grown considerably over the past 20 years. Today half of the lawyers in the courts of justice are women (as compared to one in ten in 1970). In 1990 a quarter of attorneys were women, as against a mere 6 per cent in 1970. Almost half of the graduates in economics are women. Finnish women under 50 years old are better educated than men.

Women in Professions and Leadership

Gender is still a strong factor influencing people's choice of profession and behaviour. Most of the members of the employed European labour force are in occupations in which almost all their colleagues are of the same sex despite of the fact that many of the wellbeing and equality issues encountered in working life spring from the strict gender differentiation of working life.

In the countries of the European Union, the proportion of women (aged 20-59) among those at work ranged from 40.8 per cent in Spain to 83.1 per cent in Denmark in 1987. In the Nordic countries, women's labour force participation rates are among the highest in the Western world. In 1989, the rate (among women aged 16-74) varied between 62 per cent in Norway and 70 per cent in Sweden. For the 25-54 years of age cohort female participation rates were as follows: Sweden 91 per cent, Denmark and Finland 87 per cent and Norway 79 per cent. Finland differs from the other Nordic countries with regard to part-time work: only one out of ten women works part-time in Finland as compared to one out of two employed women in the other Nordic countries. Women are numerically an important part of the labour force, and they have taken advantage particularly of the expansion of employment opportunities in the service industries and in the public sector. In France in 1984, women occupied

53 per cent of all service sector jobs, representing 78 per cent of the jobs occupied by women employees as a whole. However, the overall pattern of the restricted range of occupations in which women work has to be noticed. Even in Sweden, where there has been a positive state policy of encouraging women to enter non-traditional areas of work, women were still to be found in only 56 out of 161 occupations in 1987, and are still largely concentrated in the typical areas of nursing and welfare jobs, teaching, secretarial, clerical and retail work. Although the Nordic welfare state has facilitated the integration of women into paid work, it is simultaneously based upon women's undervalued, low-paid or unpaid work. To some extent, it may be argued that a 'public patriarchy', i.e. the welfare state, has replaced the traditional private patriarchy within the family.

Gender differentiation is also manifest vertically, i.e. women and men stand at different levels of hierarchy in working life and organisations. For example, the figures for the number of women in school leadership roles in France, Sweden, Ireland and England and Wales show that women are greatly underrepresented in senior posts both absolutely and relatively. However, education is a female-dominated area. The proportion of female students in teacher education ranged from 67 per cent in Poland in 1985-1986 to 78 per cent in England and Wales in 1986-1987.

The representation of women on university staff in France, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Poland and England and Wales seldom exceeded 25 per cent, with the exception of Poland. The proportion of female professors ranges from 0.7 per cent to 9 per cent of university professors in twelve European countries in 1985-1986. Female academic staff is underrepresented even in those areas where women students are in the majority.

The presence of women in the political arena has risen steadily in all Nordic countries, to the point where today it is the highest in the world. The principal example is the national parliament, where the proportion of women in Denmark, Norway and Sweden exceeds 30 per cent. After the election of 1991, women in Finland had taken the lead with 38.5 per cent of the MPs. The Norwegian cabinet, led by a female prime minister, holds the world record for the proportion of female cabinet ministers with 45 per cent. In addition, since 1980 the Republic of Iceland has had a female president. However, despite Nordic women's fairly strong position in the political arena, politics is still a man's world.

Women are usually employed at lower hierarchial levels than men. In Finland in 1990, 43 per cent of upper white-collar workers were women, yet only one in five of those in mana-

gerial positions was a woman. Two thirds of the lower white-collar workers were women, but only 27 per cent were employed as junior managers.

In addition this waste of women's talents and qualifications, there is little recognition of women's experiences or of their contribution to knowledge. The academe and scientific knowledge do not seem to be 'objective' and gender-free. Historically, professional knowledge has been created by men, and it is only for some hundred years that women have had access to universities, professional education. Male professors are often preferred to female professors as experts and holders of expert knowledge. Professional knowledge should be re-evaluated and restructured on an equal basis which should include the perspectives arising out of women's historical experiences. The transformation of professional education and scientific knowledge has begun through women's studies.

Women's Studies and Research on Women in the Nordic Countries

Historical, socio-economic, cultural and linguistic similarities tie the Nordic countries together. The pattern of women's life in the region has developed along some similar lines. Today women in each Nordic country participate in education, employment and politics to fairly equal degrees. The Nordic countries are frequently considered models of the successful application of policies of social and gender equality. However, a closer analysis of the Nordic countries reveals patterns of underrepresentation, discrimination and sexism very similar to those found elsewhere, and there are few signs of a deeper transformation of accepted values or of a redistribution of power and resources between men and women.

The gender composition of the student population at universities and institutions of higher education is quite similar in all Nordic countries today. As elsewhere, Nordic women are concentrated in fields like humanities and teaching, while men tend to be in the areas of technology and sciences.

Nordic women's studies had firm roots in the gender-role and family research of the 1960s. The gender-role issue spread beyond the academic community and led to a lively public debate during this period. Later, these issues were integrated into the political apparatus and developed into an institutionalized policy of gender equality, sometimes called the 'Nordic state feminism'.

As elsewhere, Nordic women's studies have been closely tied to the new feminist move-

ments. Some differences can be found with respect to the goals, strategies and alliance policies of the movements in the individual countries. Women's studies and feminist research has gained a foothold in all Nordic countries. At present, more than twenty university centres for feminist research and women's studies exist. Women's studies are taught at all universities, organized both within special units and integrated within disciplines and departments.

Supporting Systems for Women's Career Aspirations: the Case of Finland

Finnish women were the first in Europe to gain the right to vote and the first in the world to become eligible to public office in 1906. Finnish women have been in paid employment for over a hundred years. The institution of housewife has never been common in Finland. A working woman, in most cases a mother of young children, who is still doing most of the domestic work, is giving a truly significant contribution to the nation. The Finnish society and the Finnish social services support women in combining these two demanding tasks. The systems supporting the Finnish women are as follows:

1. Economic independence
2. Parental leave for mothers and fathers
3. Opportunity for child-care leave
4. Good day care
5. Hot meals for children at school and for parents at the workplace
6. Good care of the elderly
7. Social security independent of spouse's income
8. Unemployed benefits and pension rights unaffected by spouse's income
9. The Equality Act and Amendments (1987, 1992, 1994): equal rights, equal responsibilities and equal opportunities

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Professional Aspirations

Advancing in a career requires the overcoming of external and support-availability barriers. The external barriers are low self-concept, role prejudice, and gender-role socialization. Support-availability barriers include limited education and training, few collegial networks, and limited financial resources.

Enhancing individual autonomy. The process of personal self-protection should include efforts for the protection of women's interests generally within the professional sphere. Women should do what they can, given their circumstances, to make their male colleagues aware of the extra social baggage carried by women on their professional quests, and the costs of that extra burden. Developing the habit of persistence in seeking what professionals want and need is a prerequisite for providing individual space.

Planning one's professional career. For female professionals it is crucial to plan strategically for a career, to make five-year and ten-year plans as part of a process of conscious decision-making instead of acting on a day-to-day basis according to other persons' needs.

Autonomy, decision-making and authority. One form of power exercised by employees is the power to exert control over their own work. Traditionally, women have had little opportunity to control their own work, to make decisions and to exercise authority. Measured indicators of an organizations' promotion of gender equity might query the actual control that employees have over their own work, who makes the decisions and what kinds of decisions women and men make, and who exercise power and how they exercise it.

Building an identity. For women, professionalization may entail a double agenda. Women who become experts may need to undergo a second process of change, a change from a passive to an active persona, from the player of a supportive role to a central character, a person prepared for autonomy. In fact, female professionals have to build themselves a new identity. Women jumping into the male-defined practical fields may not gain power but instead may risk losing the their self.

Networking. Joining or organizing other (female) professionals' groups appropriate to particular studies or location or activity provides necessary social contacts and support. Professional associations, too, offer opportunities to make networks.

Mentor support in making a career. A mentoring system can be rewarding both to the employee aiming at self-development and to the mentor. In mentoring a senior colleague helps her junior colleague to clarify her own views and objectives. In interaction, colleagues have an opportunity to develop an authoritative professional voice of their own.

Recruitment of non-traditionals. Encouraging women and men to pursue and succeed in careers that have been dominated by the opposite sex might help ensure gender equity in professional education and salary balance. In career guidance, counsellors and other educators themselves might not inform women of leadership opportunities and training in various

occupational areas. Working women too, aspire to continue their education. Leadership and management training for female employees initiated by employers may encourage women to break down the glass ceiling.

Elimination of harassment. Many workplace settings have sexual harassment policies to deal with the problem. Sensitizing workers to avoidance of sex-role stereotyping, and helping females and males work together in constructive environments is an important condition for collaboration. Unconsciously, women might not be seen first as individuals and professionals with particular characteristics, potential strengths and qualifications. Instead, they might be seen first as women, defined by the supposed properties of their gender.

European Dimension of Promoting Gender Equity

Years of work on the issues of gender equity in education by the commissions of European Union and the European countries have not resulted in any large-scale reduction of gender inequities in professional education or in the wider society. Nor does the spate of recent proposals for school reform or for changes in the requirements of teacher preparation offer any better hope of developing new directions for recognizing and displacing systematic oppressive gender relations. The discourse of modernism has failed to challenge the received 'males-as-norms' conceptions of the purposes of professional education.

An uneven, sex-biased division of labour has been maintained in all European countries. This is also the case in Finland, even though a half of the total labour force are women. The traditional pattern of division in domestic labour has been transferred to working life where women's occupations tend to be in home economics, nursing, garment industry, public services, and clerical jobs. Men tend to make political, economic and scientific decisions and lead whereas women tend to be in positions to carry out these policies. The degree to which women's access to credit, power, decision making, and education have been restricted varies between the countries belonging to the European Union.

Stereotyped gender-role attitudes have been a part of the framework of gender stratification in societies. The sex-specific enrolment patterns of educational institutions are also reflected in gender-stereotyped school subjects and occupational choices. Gender discrimination has been especially harmful to women because it limits their professional opportunities, incomes and opportunities for using their talents. On the hand, the equally stereotyped role

expectations according to which men are supposed to be insensitive, fearless, adventurous and economically responsible for their families might result in uneven role adoption where there are no choices or options.

Gender-role attitudes and stereotypes of teachers, administrators and leaders might exert influence on co-workers' behaviour. These key persons mediate social values and serve as gender-role models to the counterparts. In interaction, the counterparts' conceptions of gender roles influence their behaviour, expectations and attitudes toward females and males.

But what are the processes which maintain and reproduce the female and male roles, and their different positions in hierarchies and cultures? Why should women remain subordinate after the tradition of 'family wage' and 'male breadwinners' has been replaced by two-income families? The European dimension of promoting women's professional career aspirations might focus on those two questions.

Identifying the European dimension of promoting gender equality, again, might include the following aspects:

1. The goal: What kind of Europe do we want to develop?
   What is our sense of (European and/or female) identity
2. The multi-cultural perspective
3. The unity and diversity in gender issues in cross-cultural settings
4. Conflict and solution
5. Social, cultural, political and economic aspects
6. Value systems (human rights, democracy, individualism, freedom, social justice)

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APPENDIX 1

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